



**Northern
Maine
Development
Commission**

To: Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development

From: Northern Maine Development Commission

Re: Support for LD 2164 – Vacant School Housing Conversion Program

Date: February 3, 2026

Dear Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Northern Maine Development Commission, we write in strong support of LD 2164, *An Act to Assist Communities with Converting Vacant School Buildings into Housing*.

As an organization that serves municipalities across Aroostook County and northern Maine, we regularly see the challenges communities face when school buildings are closed and transferred to municipal ownership. Former schools are often centrally located, structurally durable, and valued community assets. Yet they also present significant hurdles, including high upfront costs, environmental concerns, regulatory complexity, and limited local capacity to evaluate and advance reuse.

LD 2164 responds directly to these realities. It establishes a practical, voluntary framework that enables municipalities to partner with Maine Redevelopment to access technical assistance, coordinated project support, and targeted funding to evaluate and advance housing reuse. The dedicated funding included in this bill is essential to making reuse feasible. Without upfront resources for feasibility analysis, environmental assessment, and site preparation, some former school buildings remain vacant for years. This leads to continued deterioration, increased municipal carrying costs, and lost opportunities to address local housing needs.

The funding proposed in LD 2164 is targeted to remove these barriers so properties can be positioned for redevelopment rather than becoming long-term liabilities. Removing these early phase capital expenditures to determine a site's potential for reuse empowers municipalities to market their properties more effectively and de-risk future private investments.

Maine is facing a well-documented housing shortage that affects communities of all sizes. Meeting the State's goal to create 80,000 new housing units will require a mix of new construction and the reuse of existing public assets. Former school buildings represent one of the most practical and near-term opportunities to contribute to housing supply while reducing long-term municipal burden.

For smaller and rural communities in particular—including many in northern Maine that we serve—limited staff capacity and the complexity of environmental, financial, and regulatory requirements can stall projects indefinitely. LD 2164 fills a critical gap by pairing coordinated expertise through a trusted statewide partner with capital support, without shifting new mandates or responsibilities onto municipalities.

We believe this approach will meaningfully support communities across Maine, help unlock housing opportunities, and align state investment with municipal capacity. For these reasons, Northern Maine Development Commission urges the Legislature to support LD 2164 and we thank the sponsor and

committee for advancing a thoughtful, community-driven solution to vacant public buildings and Maine's housing shortage.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,

Robert Clark
Executive Director
Northern Maine Development Commission



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LD 2164

Only submitting written Letter of Support. Will not be providing testimony in person or via zoom.